

**Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee
Minutes
March 16, 2005**

Members: Chairman L. Johnson, Vice-Chairman C. Heaps, Dr. M. Perry, and Mr. D. Bourdon. Ms. C. Baker-Jones, Mr. T. Kelly, Ms. D. Judge, Mr. P. Wills, III and Mr. M. Weir absent.

Staff: Mr. L. Hindman, Mr. B. Harvey, Mr. D. Webster, Mrs. K. Edwards, NRP Officer S. Richardson, NRP Officer D. Callahan, Ms. B. Joyce, and Mr. J. Homyack.

Other: Mr. C. Brown (MD Wood Duck Initiative), Mr. S. Kendrot (USDA-Wildlife Services), and Mr. S. Goss (MD Outfitters & Guide Association).

Chairman, Ladd Johnson, called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m.

Legislative Update (Larry Hindman) – HB 380 proposes to increase hunting opportunities on the lower Potomac River by decreasing the distance between the shoreline emerging at mean low water and the Offshore Waterfowl Zone from 800 to 400 yards. It is currently moving through the Maryland General Assembly.

Nutria Control at Blackwater NWR (Steve Kendrot, USDA-Wildlife Services) – Mr. Kendrot gave a power point presentation regarding the Nutria eradication project. Please refer to Attachment 1.

Mourning Dove Hunter Questionnaire Survey (Bill Harvey) – On August 16, 2004, the Migratory Game Bird Advisory Committee (MGBAC) discussed changes to the mourning dove hunting season. The MGBAC proposed to move some of the days from the earlier split to the later split and Mr. Harvey proposed to start the season on the first Saturday in September rather than September 1st because most kids, depending on what day September 1st fell on, are not able to participate the first day or two of the season. The Game Program is interested in getting response from the dove hunters (n = 7,000) through a Dove Hunter Survey (Attachment 2) regarding those proposed changes. The questionnaire survey will be sent to randomly select 1,000 hunters.

Mr. Harvey asked for the committee's (MGBAC) comments on the survey. Donald Webster proposed a new question for the survey to ask if dove hunters would want to exchange a 70-day season for a 60-day season in order to dove hunt all day during the entire season. It was suggested that hunters be asked to rank the type of hunting areas by order of preference rather than check the type of areas they hunt.

Maryland Wood Duck Initiative (Cliff Brown, MD Wood Duck Initiative) – The Wood Duck Initiative has installed Wood Duck boxes in Kent County on Chesapeake Farms, Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge, and Millington Wildlife Management Area (WMA). Half of the pre-existing boxes (6-10,000) are non-functional, i.e., lack of maintenance, box design, etc. The goal is to get a statewide database to identify how many boxes are out there, their location, are they functional, and nest box usage. Please reference Attachment 3.

Waterfowl Management Update – Larry Hindman

Update of the Proposed Outfitter and Guide Regulations – Since the Master Hunting Guide (MHG) Stakeholders Meeting, the Game Program also met with a smaller group of waterfowl outfitters resulting in some major changes to the proposals. A few of these changes include:

1. Elimination of one hunting party per day
2. The Department has proposed bag limit restriction for AP geese for guides (1 per hunting party).

The AP bag limit has been strongly opposed by the outfitters. Mr. Hindman indicated he believed the Department may change the proposal, but at this time no decision has been made.

Mr. Hindman indicated that the proposed regulations place limitation on entry into the outfitter and guide industry by requiring participants to have a good record. Persons who have two or more occurrences of the following overt convictions within the previous 3 years will not be issued a license. These overt violations include (1) hunting with the aid of bait, (2) hunting with the aid of live decoys, (3) hunting during a closed season, (4) exceeding the daily bag limit, violating shooting hours, (5) or any other violation of waterfowl outfitter and guide regulation, the license will not be issued. If an outfitter (employer) in an investigation is considered aiding and abetting or “linked” to a guide (employee) who is in violation of the regulations listed above, their license will also be revoked and they will not be able to renew.

Regulated Shooting Areas (RSA) will not need an outfitter license if hunters are nonpaying guests. A person or person who runs a club and receives monetary compensation and who provides personal guiding services is required to obtain a license.

The final regulations should be ready by close of business today and they will be sent to the MGBAC members.

2005 Midwinter Waterfowl Survey – The total waterfowl populations were higher than last year due to increase in Scaup. There was also an increase in the wintering Canada goose population. Please see Attachment 4.

Mute Swan Management – The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has published a list of non-native, human-introduced birds that are no longer protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Mute swan is included in this list. As of March 15 mute swans are State-regulated. The Wildlife and Heritage Service and volunteers will start oiling eggs in mid-April. Following oiling, the agency will start reducing the adult swan population. The Agency will also issue permit to control swans to property owners.

Mute Swan Research - The preliminary results of the two-year evaluation of Mute Swans grazing on Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) have been completed. The research showed that swans reduced SAV density by 70%, mean shoot density by 76%, and mean plant height by 40% in control plots grazed by swans compared to exclosures where swans could not reach SAV.

Mutes Swan Telephone Opinion Survey – Under the authority of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), undergrad students from the University of Maryland (UM) hired (using funds from UM and DNR) the Mason Dixon Polling and Research Company on February 23-25th. They conducted a random telephone survey to 630 people to determine public attitudes and awareness of Mute Swans in the Chesapeake Bay. The draft results declared 86% support control once the public was informed on the negative impacts of Mute Swans to the Bay. The survey indicated that citizens showed greater support for a hunting season to control swans compared to egg addling. Mr. Hindman will send out the results once they are finalized to the committee (MGBAC).

Scaup Telemetry – WHS staff trapped two adult female Scaup to test a new satellite radio package. A research proposal was submitted to the Atlantic Flyway Technical Section for support and funding (\$7,000) by Mr. Scott Petri’s, Long Point Waterfowl and Wetland Research, Ontario Canada. The research was not funded by the AFTS. The satellite radio used by WHS is powered by a solar

powered battery and is tracked by satellite. The purpose of this project is to determine if the technology is useful for possible future Scaup studies in discovering the timing of Scaup migration, identify important staging areas, migration corridors, and breeding area affiliations and to assist in determining the cause of the decline in Scaup.

USFWS Review of Electronic-motorized Decoys – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service distributed a Review of Electronic-motorized Decoys for Taking Migratory Game Birds (Attachment 5) to the Flyway States/Councils asking for their input. All but the South Carolina study showed that electronic decoys did increase hunter success. The USFWS is asking if there should be restrictions on the use of electronic decoys on the basis of fair chase. Some states have already prohibited the use of electronic-motorized decoys. This year's Maryland Hunter Questionnaire Survey (mailed by DNR) will ask what portion of waterfowl hunters use electronic decoys.

New Business – Natural Resources Police (NRP) Officer Danny Callahan thanked the committee for giving him the opportunity to participate in the MGBAC meetings and introduced NRP Officer Scott Richardson who will now be the NRP technical advisor to the MGBAC.

Chairman Johnson will draft a letter to NRP to request they prepare a recommendation on what constitutes a live decoy and baiting situation. Based on NRP's recommendations the MGBAC will then draft their own recommendations on the live decoy (08.03.07.05) and baiting (08.03.10.07) regulations. The goal is to create a clear definition for hunters of what constitutes a live decoy situation and to provide consistency in enforcing the regulation.

Chairman Johnson informed the MGBAC there is an opportunity for Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge (BNWR) to obtain the cleaned dredged spoil from the dredging operation in the Baltimore Harbor. About 3,000,000 cubic yards a year can be pumped to BNWR, which can restore the entire habitat that was lost to nutria. The soil will be barged into Parsons Creek and then pumped from Parsons Creek into BNWR and the spoils will eventually run into the Fishing Bay WMA. Chairman Johnson asked for committee approval to write a letter in support of the project on behalf of the Fishing Bay WMA, BNWR, and other effected areas to recapture the lost marshes. The committee made no decision at this time.

Mr. Perry announced a four-day Sea Duck Conference in November at Annapolis where scientist and managers from around the world will attend. The Atlantic Flyway Council, USFWS, and the Putuxent Research Center will sponsor the conference.

Old Business – The August 16, 2005 minutes were approved, which will be posted with the rest of the approved MGBAC minutes on the DNR website (www.dnr.md.gov).

Chairman Johnson announced that some scientists support the theory that waterfowl species are not commingling where mallard release programs are and Resident Canada Geese are also not actively commingling between the resident and migratory populations, but he will keep the committee (MGBAC) informed.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 p.m.